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Make Buckling Up a Thanksgiving Tradition

Fatalities up, seat belt use down as enforcement period begins

SPRINGFIELD – As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches and thousands of motorists take to the roads, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is reminding the public to travel safely as new statewide survey results show a slight decrease in seat-belt usage this year. Through Sunday, IDOT will be partnering with law enforcement throughout Illinois to increase patrols and promote safety as part of the national “Click It or Ticket” and “Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over” campaigns.

“Seat belts save lives. We know that buckling up is the best way to protect yourself when traveling in a vehicle,” said Priscilla Tobias, director of IDOT's Office of Program Development. “Our goal is zero fatalities on Illinois highways, but we need your help. Please make this Thanksgiving an enjoyable, safe time for you and your families by buckling up and refusing to get behind the wheel if you have been drinking.”

New observational surveys by IDOT show that the statewide seat belt usage rate for front-seat occupants dropped from 95.2 percent in 2015 to 93 percent in 2016, despite a state law enacted in 2012 that requires all vehicle occupants to wear seat belts. State data show that an estimated 421 lives were saved in Illinois in 2015 because of proper seat belt and child safety seat use.

More than half of all traffic fatalities involve someone not wearing a seat belt, according to IDOT statistics. To encourage every motorist to buckle up and drive sober, hundreds of seat belt enforcement zones, roadside safety checks and saturation patrols will take place during the Thanksgiving holiday period.

“The highways will be busy and motorists and passengers are especially at risk if traffic laws are not followed,” said Illinois State Police Director Leo Schmitz. “Law enforcement agencies across the state will partner to enforce these laws to keep motorists safe over the holiday.”

Through Nov. 20, 974 people died in crashes this year in Illinois, up from 868 at this same point a year ago. If this trend continues, Illinois will experience the highest amount of traffic fatalities in seven years.

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